Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in Benedetti's "Five Years of Life"

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Preliminary Remarks

This article deals with the relations between narrative (more precisely, narration) and fiction in a short story by Mario Benedetti, "Five Years of Life."[2] Its theoretical frame of reference is S.-Y. Kuroda and Ann Banfield's non-communicational or poetic theory of narrative, seen as an alternative to communicational narrative theory, which has occupied a dominant position since narratology came into being. Given that the terms *narrative theory, communicational theory* (or *theory of narrative communication*), and *narratology* are all often used and often used ambiguously, I would like to clarify what I understand by narratology and communicational theory of narrative as well as the context of what might be interpreted as a "return" to Kuroda's and Banfield's theories.[3]

By *narratology,* I understand first a school of literary theory or, more precisely, of the theory of literary narrative, which was first formed in the mid 1960s and based at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, then at the École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales in Paris (its socio-institutional heritage is not indifferent but determines the meaning of the adjective *structuralist* in the term *structuralist narratology*). Gérard Genette swiftly became its leading figure. For historical reasons which deserve closer

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examination, his prominence began to extend outside France in the late 1970s, particularly in the Netherlands, the United States, and Israel; it later reached other countries in Europe, often by an indirect route, particularly in German-speaking countries, which were subject to other influences. The program put forward by narratology was expressed as follows in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method:* "Analysis of narrative discourse will thus be for me, essentially, a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating" (29). It was reformulated in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* and in the preface to the French translation of Käte Hamburger's *Die Logik der Dichtung* (*The Logic of Literature*): "the work of fictional narratology, always more or less focused on the comparison of discourse and story, assumes (by virtue of a provisional methodological decision) that the nonserious pretense of fiction—to tell a story that has actually happened—is taken seriously" (113). *Story, narrative* (or *narrative discourse,* or simply *discourse*), *narrating* (or *narrator*): narratology cannot do without the propositions these words encapsulate. They designate issues so essential that it cannot call them into question without undermining its own legitimacy.

(1) There is a story, which must be clearly distinguished from the narrative in which it is expressed.

(2) The narrative is always uttered by somebody addressing somebody else—even in the case of written narrative: "uttered," here, means "produced in verbal form, whether oral or written." This is what Genette terms the *narrating* (*narration* in French).

(3) In the case of narrative fiction, the story and the narrating (and thus the narrator and the narratee) are fictional. More precisely, a fictional act of narrating duplicates the author's real act, which Genettian narratology passes over, although in its absence there would simply be no narrative. The fictional narrator recounts to the narratee a series of events he or she knows before his or her act of narration. He or she is the one who makes use of the categories of *time* (*order, duration, frequency*), *mode,* and *voice* in Genettian narratology. He or she is behind the selection and presentation (sometimes termed *focalization*) of narrative information in other versions of narratology.

Somebody addressing somebody else, a narrator modeled on the speaker in communication and understood to be fictional in the case of fictional narrative: narratology can be termed a *communicational theory of narrative*—including fictional narrative.

Contemporary debates accord great importance to the difference between *structuralist narratology, classical narratology,* and *postclassical narratologies* (this terminology was put forward not by historians, but rather by the central figures of the second movement). Postclassical narratologies, they claim, are distinguished by a profusion of new methods and research hypotheses. They add that it draws on a range of sciences and that its corpus is much larger and more varied than that of classical narratology. Nevertheless, it seems to me that retaining the term *narratology* is at least as important as the distinction between classical and postclassical, as long as it is understood what using this term means: it designates this very set of propositions even if they survive in different, but still translatable, forms.

The context of what might be interpreted as a "return" to Kuroda's and Banfield's theories is one of an epistemological history of literary studies. This type of approach is based, first, on the recognition of the historicity of theories: the theories and the concepts they employ, the terms used, etc., are not natural entities, but historical realities; in other words, nothing is obvious, nothing is given, all is constructed. From this point of view, nothing guarantees the superiority of contemporary theories over those of the past; conversely, there is nothing to stop past theories, which may have been forgotten or not understood, from gaining contemporary pertinence. Then, it is a question of setting up the principle of the commensurability of theories: however numerous and diverse their approaches, periods, scholarly frames of reference, etc., it must always be possible to compare theories and evaluate them in terms of the description of their object—as well as, in the case of literary theories, in terms of their interpretative potential. This is the function of the opposition between communicational and non-communicational theories of narrative here.

I will now turn to Kuroda and Banfield's theories. Without dwelling on localized discrepancies between the two authors, I will retain the following six propositions from their work:

(1) Communicational theories of narrative, based on the concepts of narrator and narratee, whether real or fictional, can only account for a sub-category of fictional narratives: first-person fictional narratives and even, according to Banfield, first-person fictional narratives where the narrator explicitly addresses a narratee and, from a formal viewpoint, where the narrative is recounted as communication.

(2) There are fictional narratives with an (implicitly fictional) narrator and fictional narratives without a narrator, which does not mean that nobody has produced them, but simply that they contain no linguistic marker pointing to a real or fictional subject and situation of enunciation. The absence of a linguistic marker pointing to a real subject of enunciation can be termed the *enunciative effacement* or *disappearance* of the author of fictional narrative (for Banfield, the author "is not directly embodied in a first person, as a speaker in his speech"; "he does not speak. . . . He writes, rather, and in writing disappears" ["L'écriture" 27]). The absence of a linguistic marker pointing to a fictional subject of enunciation: this should be called the *absence of a narrator* (and not enunciative effacement of the narrator or, as it is termed more often, an "effaced narrator"). Sentences written in free indirect style (in the third-person in the past) in French or in English form a particular case for study which falsifies the hypothesis of the effaced narrator (see the demonstration in *Unspeakable Sentences,* notably 88–98 and 195–196).

(3) The omniscient narrator, in most cases, is an *ad hoc* explanation (in most cases, since cases cannot be ignored where the author, setting up a sort of turnstile where invention and knowledge constantly revolve, represents him- or herself in the narrative as an omniscient narrator). As Kuroda puts it, "The omniscient narrator cannot be identified by a linguistic mechanism whose existence we can establish independently of the assumption of his existence in the way the narrator [of first-person narratives] can" ("Epistemology, Style and Grammar" 389).[4]

(4) A clear distinction should be made between those elements pertaining to fictional representation (characters and their speech, thoughts, and mental states) and those pertaining to the means of constructing the representation (the language and

style of the representation). Banfield writes, "Represented consciousness is not a 'realistic reproduction' of the mind at work; it does not create 'transparent minds.' The mind is never transparent, not even to 'omniscient narrators.' Rather, its contents are hypothetically reconstructed and represented in a language sensitive to its various modes. Only in a framework with the preconceptions of the dual voice position does the departure of the representation's style from that which the character would have used had he spoken imply a narrator's voice" (*Unspeakable Sentences* 211).

(5) Modern, third-person fictional narrative can be seen as a structured collection of information, some of which has no origin that can be assigned to the fictional world (these might be termed *narrative,* or *narrative-zero,* or again *objective* sentences or contexts, as opposed to *subjective* ones),[5] while others of which stem from one or more subjects of consciousness who belong to the fictional world (and might be termed *subjective* sentences or contexts). I shall leave sentences of direct discourse to one side, since there is no fundamental difference in analyses of them performed by communicational theories or Kuroda and Banfield's. Narrative or objective sentences cannot be seen as the representation of a separate point of view from that of the characters. They do not represent any point of view and cannot be false. They establish the elements constituting the facts in the fictional world. The other sentences express subjectivity, but one which is not linked to a traditional *I-here-now* syncretism ("third-person subjectivity," if you like). They present fictional facts from the point of view of one or more characters who are not in the position of speakers. Recourse to the idea of context becomes necessary to the extent that certain sentences contain no subjective elements or constructions (defined as such on the basis of a precise linguistic analysis), but appear in the middle of other sentences which do contain such characteristic elements or constructions and are thus interpreted as subjective.

(6) Reading a third-person fictional narrative implies recognizing the author's intentions relative to the objective or subjective character of sentences or contexts. In this sense, there is indeed a form of communication or co-intentionality between author and reader, but Kuroda and Banfield prefer to limit the term *communication* to communication between speaker and addressee properly speaking, that is, between a speaker who can directly imprint his or her subjectivity in the utterance and an intended addressee, who can also be marked in the utterance. The "communication" or, preferably, the co-intentionality between author and reader does not entail the inescapable presence of a relation of communication between a narrator and a narratee on the fictional level.

If I have chosen this theory instead and in the place of narratology, which has provided a frame of reference for generations, it is because in my view it is superior to the latter on several accounts. First of all, it explains why the author chooses the form of a first- or third-person fictional narrative to present the story. It avoids the reduction of third-person fictional narrative to the model of the first-person fictional narrative, based in turn on the communicational model of discourse. It returns, on the contrary, to the traditional dualist or differentialist view which sees first-person fictional narrative as a particular case of fictional narrative[6] and supports it with linguistic analysis. Second, Kuroda and Banfield's theory makes it possible to study fictional narrative as both narrative and fiction. It does not do away with the issue of fictionality

by providing the narrative with a narrator who is fictional, or viewed as such, and purportedly recounts real facts. It affirms, on the contrary, that not all fictional narratives are recounted by a fictional narrator and that, when they are not, there is no reason to have recourse to the same type of linguistic, narratological, or reader-oriented analysis as when they are (and even less reason to introduce *ad hoc* auxiliary analyses in their place with the sole intent of saving a hypothesis threatened by facts which counter it).[7] Finally, their theory is a poetic theory of narration, which posits the existence of a poetic intention (to create) which is manifest, recognizable, and distinct from an intention to communicate. This does not condemn it to subjectivism any more, for example, than would the existence of an intention to communicate. By contrast, it makes it possible to relate it to other poetic theories dealing with the novel, theatre, or poetry.

BEFORE ATTEMPTING a reading of "Five Years of Life" based on Kuroda and Banfield's theory, I wish to offer a few remarks regarding the ways in which some of the propositions outlined above may be applied.

"Five Years of Life" presents itself as an unnatural narrative[8] written in the third person with representation of the thoughts and states of mind of a character. It is both similar and distinct from the type of fictional narrative for which Kuroda and Banfield's theory was conceived (realist, third-person fictional narrative with representation of the thoughts and mental states of one or more characters). Narratology, for its part, is doubly handicapped when faced with a narrative of this ilk, which (1) is not in the first person (i.e., has no explicit narrator or narratee and contains sentences which exclude the presence of an implicit or effaced narrator) and (2) presents fictional facts which do not correspond to facts in the real referential world, rendering the supposition of a fictional narrator recounting real facts difficult to uphold. For the simple reason that it is free from this double handicap, Kuroda and Banfield's theory seems the most promising.

The story takes place in Paris in the late 1960s. The protagonists are Raúl Morales and Mirta Cisneros. He is Uruguayan and she is Argentinean. He is a writer (of short stories) and she paints, or rather *did* paint before she arrived in Paris. They meet one night in the Bonne Nouvelle metro station after the exit doors have been shut. They talk, telling each other their life stories and unfulfilled dreams. At a quarter to five, Raúl says to Mirta:

> You know something? I'd give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now. I mean, if I were divorced from my wife, and she hadn't killed herself; and I had a good job in Paris; and when they opened the station again, we could walk out of here as what we really are: a couple.

Mirta replies, "I'd give five years, too," and adds, "Don't worry, we'll manage somehow" (103). At five o'clock, the doors open, Raúl and Mirta leave the metro, and the continuation of events shows that the desires expressed by Raúl in the form of a promise to make a great sacrifice have become reality. The ending of the story nevertheless contains a surprise, which I shall discuss later.

It is, therefore, a non-realist or unnatural narrative. There are at least two "physical or logical impossibilities" (Alber et al. 116): (1) the immediate fulfillment of all of Raúl's wishes (or the wish to be transported into a future corresponding to his desires) and (2) the fact that Raúl gives up, or sacrifices, five years of his life. When he leaves the metro station, Raúl is divorced, his wife has not killed herself, he has found a sufficiently steady, well-paying job that enables him to live in a smart apartment building, and he has been married to Mirta for several years: all of this is presented as real and objective in the fictional world. At the same time, Raúl has sacrificed five years of his life, which means that five years of his life are missing, leaving a gap. The reader must accept this, too, as real and objective within the fictional world.

I prefer to use the term gap, rather than ellipsis, to avoid confusion. Temporal ellipsis, as defined by Genettian narratology, consists in the elision in the narrative ("by the narrator" as narratology puts it) of a temporal segment of the story,[9] which may or may not be described in the continuation of the story, but which the reader is not permitted to imagine as a missing segment in the life of the characters. The gap in "Five Years of Life," by contrast, is part of the storyworld, and the reader is obliged, on reaching the end of the story, to imagine it as a segment missing from Raúl's life. I should add that no temporal ellipsis can be identified in the narrative of the events which form the ending to "Five Years of Life."

"Five Years of Life" represents the thoughts and mental states of Raúl and nobody else (Genettian narratology would call this "internal focalization" on Raúl and "external focalization" on Mirta).[10] Contrary to narratological presupposition, these passages are not the narrative, related by a narrator, of the internal events of Raúl's consciousness; they are these events' direct representation without the mediation of any point of view (the third person and the past tense do not constitute what I am calling here subjectivity or point of view). These kinds of passages are more numerous at the beginning and end of the short story, that is, on either side of the narrative of the night spent with Mirta in the metro station, which, by contrast, contains numerous passages of direct discourse.

I will limit my reading to the ending of the short story, in which the way narrative information is split between objective and subjective sentences and sentences of direct discourse is particularly interesting. I use ending in a general sense, including both the first ending, which turns out to be a false ending (organized around the revelation that Raúl's wishes have become reality) and the surprise ending. My reading uses the English translation of the text (an extract of which is provided as an annex), but I will not refrain from comparing it with the French translation and the Spanish text.

An Unspeakable Ending

Raúl, Mirta, and the "Appleton Girl" (or the False Ending)

The first paragraph of the ending is composed entirely of narrative, or objective, sentences:

> The first sign that the station was coming back to life was a cold draft. They both sneezed. Then the lights came on. Raúl held the mirror while she made herself presentable. He ran a comb through his hair too. On their way up the stairs, they bumped into the first stampede of early risers. He was thinking that he hadn't even kissed her, and wondering if he hadn't been too discreet. Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before. (103)

These sentences use the *pretérito indefinido* as a basic tense in Spanish, the *passé simple* in French, and the simple past in English, the latter playing the same role as the *passé simple* and *pretérito indefinido* when it is combined exclusively with third-person forms and non-deictic adverbs (a role masked by the fact that the simple past, like the *pretérito indefinido,* is not excluded from the formal model of written or spoken discourse, as the *passé simple* is in the standard dialect of modern French). The sentences establish the elements constituting facts in the fictional world. It cannot be doubted that the first sign of the station coming back to life is a cold draft, or the characters both sneezing, or the lights coming on, nor that these events all took place in the fictional world in the order in which they are presented in the narrative. The second-to-last sentence in the paragraph does not have a different status in the context:

> He was thinking that he hadn't even kissed her, and wondering if he hadn't been too discreet.

Raúl's thoughts, as well as the fact that he was thinking and wondering, are to be considered as real and objective in the fictional world. The last sentence poses a particular problem: "Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before" (*Afuera no hacía tanto frío como la víspera). A priori,* this sentence is an objective sentence, due to the non-deictic expression "the night before" ("*la víspera*" in Spanish, *"la veille"* in the French translation). However, this categorization is only valid on a first reading. On rereading in view of how the story ends, we know that from a referential point of view, the expression "the night before" is erroneous and that "the night before" does not designate the night preceding the moment when Raúl and Mirta leave the station, but a night five years beforehand. In other words, we are faced with the following double paradox: If the sentence is an objective sentence, it is false; therefore, it is not an objective sentence. If it is a subjective sentence, it is "ill-formed" (it should have said *"ayer,"* or in English, "yesterday"); therefore, it is not an intentionally subjective sentence.[11] It was not constructed so that the first-time reader, who is also the reader foreseen by Benedetti at the time of writing the short story, would recognize it as a subjective sentence but so that he or she would assume something erroneous without realizing it.[12]

I will offer a more synthetic reading of the rest of the passage, which is composed entirely of objective sentences and sentences of direct discourse attributed first to Mirta ("Now what?"), then to the girl they meet on Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle. The former report a certain number of facts in an objective manner: Raúl and Mirta are going together to a destination which they do not know; they meet a girl who knows them but whom they do not know;[13] she leads them to Rue de l'Échiquier, then to a building and an apartment which she knows but which they do not know. The sen-

tences in direct discourse confirm the real, objective character of these facts in the fictional world:

> "It's about time, you idiots! I've been calling the apartment all night. Where were you? Raúl, I need to borrow your Appleton. Or is it yours, Mirta?"
>
> * * *
>
> At the door to apartment seven, the girl asked: "Well, are you going to let us in or not?"
>
> * * *
>
> "I hope that by tonight you two have gotten your tongues back. Don't forget, we all promised to be at Emilia's. Bring records!" (104)

These facts have only one possible explanation in the fictional world. It can be presented in the following way: Raúl and Mirta have been transported to another world (for which we can use the notation W_2) which is homologous to the world of Raúl's wishes (at least to a certain description of that world, the one contained in the passage: "I'd give five years of my life," etc.). In W_2, Raúl and Mirta have the properties of forming a couple (the text has not yet said that they are married), living together in the same apartment, having the same friends, and going to the same parties. But the two characters do not know it and think that they are still in W_1, in which they had only just met. The text does not name the exception operator (God, the Devil, destiny . . .) who enabled the passage from W_1 to W_2, which escapes the reader's interest. W_1 and W_2 form part of a continuous time and space, as the following passage shows:

> Carefully, Raúl took his old key ring off his belt loop and noticed that the usual three keys were still there. (104)

Their continuity is also indicated, more indirectly, by the girl's "Mexican accent" and the first name of the person organizing the party, Emilia.[14] However, the two worlds are different worlds, where the properties assigned to the characters are different, as the following passage suggests:

> He tried the second [key], and the door opened. (104)

It should be noted that certain objective sentences clearly serve to eliminate the possibility of any realistic explanation (based on the idea of a single world, the one for which I have used the notation W_1):

> Raúl thought it might be a friend of Mirta's. Mirta thought it might be an acquaintance of Raúl's. (103)

It can also be seen from this example that the logic of Benedetti's narrative does not exclude reporting or narrating Mirta's thoughts within the framework of objective sentences (even though there is no other occurrence in the story). It does, however,

exclude their representation in subjective sentences or contexts. It therefore does differentiate between the two types of sentence.

The term *narrative irony* can be used (as an equivalent in the domain of narrative fiction to dramatic irony in theatre) to the extent that the reader understands what is happening to the characters a lot more quickly than they do—as early as the end of the second paragraph, while the characters are described as trying to understand in the third ("each in their own world" [104]) and, in Raúl's case, as not yet having understood in the fourth.

IN THE fourth paragraph, the switch from the *pretérito indefinido* to the *pretérito imperfecto* in Spanish and from the *passé simple* to the *imparfait* in French, which is not rendered in the English translation, indicates the switch from a narrative or objective context to a context where the perception of a subject of consciousness, Raúl, is represented:

> *Raúl, sin pronunciar palabra, con el ceño fruncido y los ojos entornados, comenzó a revisar el apartamento. En el estante encontró sus libros, señalados y anotados con su inconfundible trazo rojo; pero había otros nuevos, con las hojas a medio abrir. En la pared del fondo estaba su querida reproducción de Miró; pero además había una de Klee que siempre había codiciado. Sobre la mesa había tres fotos: una, de sus padres; otra, de un señor sospechosamente parecido a Mirta; en la tercera estaban Mirta y él, abrazados sobre la nieve, al parecer muy divertidos.* (132)

> Raúl inspected the apartment with a worried frown, in silence. In the bookcase he found his own books, dog-eared and marked up in his handwriting; but also some new ones with still-uncut pages. He saw his favorite Miró poster hanging on the wall, but also the Klee he'd always wanted. There were three photos on the table; one of his parents; one of a man who looked suspiciously like Mirta; and one of him and Mirta, rolling around in the snow in each other's arms and, apparently, having a great time. (104)[15]

In the Spanish text and the French translation, the presence of embeddable subjective elements in Banfield's sense can also be noted: the evaluative adjective "*querida*" ("*chère*" in French), the adverb derived from an adjective which can also be characterized as evaluative, "*sospechosamente*" ("*étonnamment*" in French).[16] The American translator, by contrast, has not looked for strict equivalents of "*querida*" and "*sospechosamente.*" The subjective elements indicate that the sentences represent Raúl's consciousness. Nevertheless, these sentences are ambiguous as to the level of his consciousness that they represent (reflective or non-reflective consciousness). According to Banfield's analysis, it would only be necessary to add an element or construction which could not be embedded, for example a direct question ("*¿Estaba realmente su querida reproducción de Miró?*"; "Was it really his dear Miró poster?") or simply an

exclamative word ("*Sí, siempre la había codiciado*"; "Yes, he'd always wanted it"), to impose the interpretation of the sentences as representing reflective consciousness. We would then be dealing with the representation of the conscious reflections that Raúl was making on the things he perceived rather than the simple representation of his perception. Without contradicting Banfield's linguistic analysis, it should be noted that in several of these sentences or sentence fragments, the represented perception contains an indubitable interpretative dimension, even if Raúl is mistaken in his interpretation: this is the case when he contrasts "his own books" with "some new ones" or "his own favorite Miró poster" with the Klee one. This does not contradict Banfield's linguistic analysis, but it perhaps marks the limits of her contribution to literary analysis and interpretation.

The narrative irony culminates with the circumlocution "a man who looked suspiciously like Mirta" to refer to Mirta's father.

As for the third photograph, the one showing "him and Mirta, rolling around in the snow in each other's arms and, apparently, having a great time," it plays the same role for Raúl, within the fiction, as any photograph in reality, by bearing witness to "what has been" ("The Photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been" [Barthes 85]). To quote again from Barthes, whose remarks fit perfectly here: "It is a prophecy in reverse: like Cassandra, but eyes fixed on the past, Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence. Impotent with regard to general ideas (to fiction), its force is nonetheless superior to everything the human mind can or can have conceived to assure us of reality—but also this reality is never anything but a contingency ('so much, no more')" (87).

The analysis of the passage already enables the conclusion that the language of Benedetti's narrative presents no element to justify recourse to a consciousness other than that of the subject of consciousness, Raúl. The examples quoted do not in any way manifest the presence of a narrator. In the sentences of pure narrative, adverbs and qualifying adjectives such as "carefully" in English (the Spanish uses a circumstantial complement, "*con movimiento particularmente cauteloso*"), "*particularmente,*" "*cauteloso,*" "presentable," and "old" ("*viejo*"), are not evaluative terms in Banfield's sense. On the semantic level, nothing in the text indicates the possibility that Raúl did not take off his keyring carefully, or that the keyring was not old, etc.; in other words, nothing gives the impression that such characterizations might be the result of interpretation on the part of a narrator, or the consequence of knowledge he or she might have, or the expression of his or her subjectivity, instead of referring to well-established facts in the fictional world.

The absence of a narrator also makes it possible to understand the linguistic facts of the fourth paragraph, where there is no room for narratorial intervention.[17]

Naturally, Benedetti could have chosen to write the narrative as a first-person fiction narrated by Raúl ("Hanging on the back wall was my dear Miró poster," etc.). But that would have made it difficult to unambiguously represent the consciousness of the character Raúl at the time when he undertook the examination of the apartment, as opposed to that of the narrator Raúl, who is telling the story retrospectively. Generally speaking, it would have been very difficult to eliminate the entire

set of problems linked to retrospection and therefore to the dissimulation of crucial information.

The interpretation of "the night before" in "Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before" does not require the concept of a fictional narrator recounting real facts (and thus, here, telling a falsehood), but that of a real author and source of a textual strategy of the sort that has become clear through the text examined (not telling a falsehood, but creating a forgery, a false objective sentence in my terminology).

Raúl, or the Recognition (The Surprise Ending)

First of all, it should be noted that the last paragraph introduces some disruptive elements into the system of sentences in the narrative.

> *Desde que apareciera la chica del Appleton, no se había atrevido a mirar de frente a Mirta. Ahora sí la miró.* (132)
>
> Since that girl had showed up looking for the Appleton, he hadn't dared look Mirta in the eyes. But now he did. . . . (104)

The second sentence is in the *pretérito indefinido* in Spanish and the simple past in English, yet it contains elements characteristic of subjective sentences: the deictic adverbs "*ahora,*" "now," and the exclamative "*sí.*" In the English translation, the disruption is less noticeable: on the one hand, because the combination of the simple past and "now" is usually used to make a subjective sentence using a stative verb like "be," "seem," or "look" used in the sense of "seem" (but not "do" or "look" in the sense of "watch"); on the other hand, because the exclamative "*sí*" is not literally translated. In the following sentence, which also uses the *pretérito indefinido* or simple past—

> *Ella retribuyó su interés con una mirada sin sombras, un poco fatigada tal vez, pero serena.*
>
> . . . the gaze that met his own was cloudless—a little tired, perhaps, but calm.

—the modal "*tal vez,*" "perhaps," clearly indicates the possibility that Mirta's gaze was not a little tired; in other words, it indicates that the characterization is the result of an interpretation on Raúl's part. Finally, in:

> *No la ayudó mucho, sin embargo, ya que en ese instante Raúl tuvo la certeza, no sólo de que había hecho mal en divorciarse de su esposa montevideana, histérica pero inteligente, malhumorada pero buena hembra, sino también de que su segundo matrimonio empezaba a deteriorarse.* (132)
>
> However, that didn't do her much good, since just then it dawned on Raúl, not only that he should never have divorced the wife he left in Montevi-

> deo (hysterical but smart, moody but well-stacked), but also that his second marriage was starting to come apart. (104)

it seems as though Benedetti chose to join several sentences with different syntax and different objectives or subjective statuses into a single sentence—"*Raúl tuvo la certeza de que había hecho mal en divorciarse de su esposa montevideana*"; "*Era histérica pero inteligente, malhumorada pero buena hembra*"[18]—with an ambiguous final statement: "*Raúl tuvo la certeza de que su segundo matrimonio empezaba a deteriorarse*" or "*su segundo matrimonio empezaba a deteriorarse.*" Once more, the American translator partially removes the effect of the Spanish sentence by placing the evaluative adjectives into brackets.

It can be noted that such disruptions or combinations of systems are almost exclusively limited to this passage,[19] which has a special status since it immediately precedes and prepares the reader for the final surprise.

At the same time as Raúl (that is, at the same time as Raúl recognizes the truth or, to put it differently, reorganizes the world of his beliefs), the reader learns the fact that Raúl has divorced his wife from Montevideo (introduced as a presupposition), the fact that he regrets doing so, and the fact or subjective judgment that his second marriage is starting to come apart. He or she no longer has the "step ahead" with relation to Raúl which had until now characterized his or her understanding of the ending. There is no longer any difference either between fact and subjective judgment in the presentation of the information according to which Raúl's second marriage was starting to come apart.

The story ends with one subjective sentence in the Spanish text and two in the English:

> It wasn't that he didn't love the slender, thin-blooded, almost helpless woman looking up at him from the wicker chair. But it was clear now that little remained of the naive, prodigious, explosion of feelings from that incredible night five years ago—now just a fading memory—when he first met Mirta, after fate played a trick on them and locked them up together in the Bonne Nouvelle station. (104–105)

Banfield's comments on sentences of non-reflective consciousness also hold for sentences which represent reflective consciousness or thoughts. They are not the "realistic reproduction" of the mind at work; they do not create a "transparent mind" (e.g., the omniscient narrator saying that Raúl thinks, "It's not that I don't love," etc.). The contents of consciousness are hypothetically reconstructed and represented or, to put it better, are created by such constructions (intensive adjectives, for example).

The last sentence(s) contain the surprise announced by the title of the collection, *La muerte y otras sorpresas.* It is created by the brutal revelation of a situational irony: the five years that Raúl sacrificed when he said, "I'd give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now," are the five years that separate him, at the moment of the act of consciousness represented in the last sentence(s), from the moment he

met Mirta ("little remained of the naive, prodigious, explosion of feelings from that incredible night five years ago"); in other words, they were the first five years of his life with Mirta.[20] The disappearance of those five years implies as a corollary a marriage that Raúl has missed, retaining no other happy memory beyond the distant meeting in the metro station.

The last sentence(s) also reveal a new side to Raúl's personality: his incapacity to love a woman for more than five years (it is clear that Raúl's feelings for Mirta, despite his initial denial, can no longer be called love).[21] I do not believe that, in the construction of the story, a voice can be heard that knows how long the average relationship lasts, according to some statistical truth which does not always hold for particular relationships. Rather, I think that Benedetti makes the character of Raúl partially responsible for his own misfortune.

Retrospectively, sentences like "He was thinking that he hadn't even kissed her" or "and one [photograph] of him and Mirta, rolling around in the snow in each other's arms and, apparently, having a great time" take on a pathetic resonance that they did not contain on a first reading.

From Description to Interpretation

I believe I have shown that Kuroda and Banfield's theory of unspeakable sentences can lay claim to descriptive adequation in the case of the ending of "Five Years of Life." Yet the value of a theory is also measured by its ability to form richer interpretive suggestions than those gained from a simple intuitive reading. Does the theory of unspeakable sentences satisfy this condition? This is the question I would now like to examine by returning to several specific points.[22]

I shall skim over the objective sentences. They are indispensable for establishing the elements constituting the facts of the fictional world (they exclude the possibility, for example, of facts being only fantasies, dreams, or hallucinations on the part of the characters). They are subject to a criterion of coherency. In addition, they only exist in fictional narrative. For the characters, inside the fiction, there are no objective sentences: the girl's speech, for example, is strange and invites questioning ("They just stood there in silence," "Look, don't just stand there like two bumps on a log; or should I say two morons?" [103, 104]), but it has no *a priori* power of authentication (we have seen, by contrast, that this was the role of photography relative to past reality). This disparity lies at the origin of the narrative irony I mentioned previously.

The sentences of direct speech establish the elements constituting the discursive facts in the fictional world (it cannot be doubted that the girl has said the words that the text makes her say), the discourse itself requiring analysis as belonging to the domain of subjectivity. Within the set of sentences of direct speech in "Five Years of Life," the sentences "I'd give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now," etc., and "I'd give five years, too," should be isolated as ones to which the story attributes the exceptional capacity to influence the course of events. In fact, one wonders whether their exceptional status stems from them inscribing the facts in a

possible world that is destined to be actualized, or from their perfect co-orientation, which is the reason why the possible world in question will be actualized. In any case, one of the effects of the story in the world of the reader is to de-familiarize the expression "I'd give five years of my life" and perhaps, more generally, any sentence in the conditional expressing pure unreality, or that which we consider as such.

As far as the subjective sentences are concerned (other than those of direct speech), Benedetti makes little of the fact that they are not subject to the same criterion of coherency as objective sentences ("A sentence representing consciousness need not be consistent with the 'facts' of the story because a character may be mistaken, even if only momentarily, only NOW" [Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences* 217]).[23] In fact he only makes use of it in the fourth paragraph, where Raúl and Mirta look around the apartment (as we saw, Raúl was mistaken in contrasting "his own books" with "some new ones," the two prints by Miró and Klee, and seeing only that a man looked suspiciously like Mirta in the third photo). By contrast, the closing sentences of the story—the sentence that mixes objective and subjective systems and the final sentence(s)—show total coherency between the facts established in the world of the fiction and the facts seen through the prism of Raúl's subjectivity. There is a profound pathos in the manner in which Raúl becomes aware, without there being any room for doubt or the possibility for error of the elements constituting the facts of the fictional world.

In Kuroda and Banfield's theory, the subjective sentence represents the site where the subject of consciousness takes the place of the speaker or speaking subject. It is also the interpretative hypothesis that the relations between objective sentences, subjective sentences, and sentences of direct speech allow us to construct. The last sentence of direct speech attributed to one of the two protagonists is "Now what?" A certain number of objective sentences go on to establish silence, the absence of verbal communication, and indeed communication of any sort between the two characters: "Raúl felt as though she had taken the words right out of his mouth; but he didn't get a chance to answer"; "They just stood there in silence"; "Raúl and Mirta followed her without a word or a touch, each in their own world"; "Raúl inspected the apartment with a worried frown, in silence"; "Since that girl had showed up looking for the Appleton, he hadn't dared look Mirta in the eyes." These facts offer a striking contrast with those of the night in the metro station: the characters talk a lot, share a lot, and use the communicative function of language fully. There are some very interesting linguistic phenomena in the Spanish text which cannot be rendered in English. *"Mirá, dijo él, para que veas que soy comprensivo y poco exigente, voy a empezar yo":* in this sentence, Raúl employs the ordinary familiar form of addressing Mirta (*tuteo*), as he had suggested to her shortly beforehand. But in the following sentences, *"Cuando termine, si no te dormiste, decís vos tu cuento. Y conste que si te dormís, no me ofendo. ¿Trato hecho?"* (127),[24] he uses the pronominal and verbal *voseo,* then the verbal *voseo* alone, which are forms specific to the Río de la Plata region. It is a clever way of making Mirta like him, as the rest of the text makes clear. A little later, Raúl uses the *voseo* again to find out about her private life: "*¿Vos tenés novio, o marido, o amigos?*"[25]

In the last paragraph of the story, it is clear that Raúl cannot tell Mirta that he no longer loves her or that his feelings for her are no longer what they were five years be-

forehand. It is not even necessary to suppose that his thoughts were formed verbally. If that were the case, it would be very much a "written" or "literary" form and we are reminded that Raúl had, in a sense, given up literature at the end of the night spent with Mirta ("If he had been working on one of those tidy, doggedly unsentimental stories of his, he would never have dared write anything as corny as 'He and Mirta were meant for one another.' But, luckily, he wasn't writing, and he had absolutely no problem thinking that he and Mirta were meant for one another" [102–103]). Raúl, at the end of the story, is a solitary, separate consciousness, a monad certain of his failure.

The fact that Benedetti does not represent Mirta's thoughts like he does Raúl's accentuates the mysterious nature of her character ("Don't worry, we'll manage somehow"; "the gaze that met his own was cloudless—a little tired, perhaps, but calm"; "However, that didn't do her much good"; "the slender, thin-blooded, almost helpless woman"). Unlike Raúl, Mirta is characterized by a certain form of constancy which, here, is termed "calmness" (in a sentence which combines objective and subjective systems). I think she is valued positively by the text. But I realize that Mirta's attitude could also be interpreted as blindness towards her husband's true feelings.

Finally, it can also be noted, even if it is always risky to base an interpretation on something which is not in the text, that the closing sentence(s) contain no inference as to Mirta's thoughts or state of mind, nor even any indication that Raúl is conscious that Mirta, too, is a conscious being. This might be linked to his escapist behavior in relation to his first wife ("I'm fed up with that relationship, but I don't have the guts to break it off. Whenever I write her a letter hinting that I'd like to, she answers with these long, hysterical tirades saying she'll kill herself if I leave her; that's blackmail of course, but what if she does it?" [102]; "You know something? I'd give five years of my life if I could start all over, right here and now. I mean, if I were divorced from my wife, and she hadn't killed herself"; etc.). In any case, the closing sentence(s) both tell us of the failure of the couple's relationship and show it formally.

In sum, it seems to me (1) that Kuroda and Banfield's theory enables us to notice things—oppositions, notably—which we would not have noticed otherwise (the opposition between communication and non-communication, the opposition between elements constituting the fictional facts and those belonging to the domain of subjectivity, as well as the possible disappearance of this opposition); (2) that the theory allows us to interpret our intuitive understanding of the meaning of the text (concerning the reasons for the failure of the couple formed by Raúl and Mirta). The theory is a vector of interpretation.

The closing sentence also shows that while Raúl must face failure, the story itself is a success.

Translated by Susan Nicholls

Annex

Benedetti, Mario. "Five Years of Life." Translated by Maya Gross. In *Blood Pact and Other Stories,* 103–105. Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1997.

The first sign that the station was coming back to life was a cold draft. They both sneezed. Then the lights came on. Raúl held the mirror while she made herself presentable. He ran a comb through his hair too. On their way up the stairs, they bumped into the first stampede of early risers. He was thinking that he hadn't even kissed her, and wondering if he hadn't been too discreet. Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before.

With no prior discussion, they both headed down Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle toward the Post Office. "Now what?" asked Mirta. Raúl felt as though she had taken the words right out of his mouth; but he didn't get a chance to answer. A girl in black pants and a green sweater was waving at them from across the street. Raúl thought it might be a friend of Mirta's. Mirta thought it might be an acquaintance of Raúl's. When she finally managed to cross the street, the girl ran up to them, saying energetically, with a Mexican accent: "It's about time, you idiots! I've been calling the apartment all night. Where were you? Raúl, I need to borrow your Appleton. Or is it yours, Mirta?"

They just stood there in silence. But the girls insisted: "Come on! Don't be mean. I need a good dictionary; I have a translation to do. What do you say? Look, don't just stand there like two bumps on a log; or should I say two morons? Are you on your way home? Come on; I'll go with you." And she started walking down Mazagran toward Rue de L'Echiquier, swinging her hips in rhythm with her footsteps. Raúl and Mirta followed her without a word or a touch, each in their own world. The new girl turned the corner and stopped in front of number eight. All three of them climbed the stairs (no elevator) to the fourth floor. At the door to apartment eleven, the girl asked:

"Well, are you going to let us in or not?"

Carefully, Raúl took his old key ring off his belt loop and noticed that the usual three keys were still there. He tried the first; it didn't work. He tried the second, and the door opened. The girls rushed over to the bookcase near the window and whisked the Appleton out of it. She kissed Raúl, then Mirta, on both cheeks, and said:

"I hope that by tonight you two have gotten your tongues back. Don't forget, we all promised to be at Emilia's. Bring records!" And out she shot, slamming the door.

Mirta collapsed into the wicker chair. Raúl inspected the apartment with a worried frown, in silence. In the bookcase he found his own books, dog-eared and marked up in his handwriting; but also some new ones with still-uncut pages. He saw his favorite Miró poster hanging on the wall, but also the Klee he'd always wanted. There were three photos on the table; one of his parents; one of a man who looked suspiciously like Mirta; and one of him and Mirta, rolling around in the snow in each other's arms and, apparently, having a great time.

Since that girl had showed up looking for the Appleton, he hadn't dared look Mirta in the eyes. But now he did; the gaze that met his own was cloudless—a little tired,

perhaps, but calm. However, that didn't do her much good, since just then it dawned on Raúl, not only that he should never have divorced the wife he left in Montevideo (hysterical but smart, moody but well-stacked), but also that his second marriage was starting to come apart. It wasn't that he didn't love the slender, thin-blooded, almost helpless woman looking up at him from the wicker chair. But it was clear now that little remained of the naive, prodigious, explosion of feelings from that incredible night five years ago—now just a fading memory—when he first met Mirta, after fate played a trick on them and locked them up together in the Bonne Nouvelle station.

Endnotes

1. A first version of this article was presented at the 2012 International Conference on Narrative (Las Vegas, March, 15–17).
2. Translated by Maya Gross, in *Blood Pact and Other Stories,* 95–105 (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1997). "*Cinco años de vida*" was first published in *La muerte y otras sorpresas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1968). It was republished in the same year in an anthology of short stories edited by Mario Arregui entitled *La otra mitad del amor contada por siete hombres* (Montevideo: Arca, 1968), which has its counterpart in another anthology of short stories, *Aquí la mitad del amor contada por seis mujeres* (Ángel Rama, ed., Montevideo: Arca, 1966).
3. This development is an addition to the first version of the text at the request of James Phelan, whom I would like to thank for reading my article and making global and local suggestions.
4. I have replaced "in the reportive style," which takes its meaning within Kuroda's theoretical system, with "of first-person narratives," which refers to the largest sub-category of narratives "in the reportive style."
5. The adjectives *objective* and *subjective* are used in a technical sense. The characterization of a sentence of fictional narrative as objective or subjective depends on a linguistic analysis (time, personal and spatiotemporal deixis, types of adjectives, etc.) and not an interpretation which would be subjective by definition in the usual sense of the term. The question will arise once more later on in the analysis of the sentence "Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before."
6. See Patron *Le Narrateur* 12–16 *et passim;* and "Narrative Fiction Prior to 1850."
7. Ryan 58, n. 7 offers an example of this type of analysis: "I am willing to pretend to believe in a world where Emma Bovary exists, commits suicide and thinks the thoughts related by the narrator. But I don't imagine that, in this world, thoughts are transparent (Charles being incapable of reading Emma's thoughts is proof of that); nor do I imagine that there is one individual, the narrator, who has the gift of reading minds. In my act of imagination, I place the existence of the narrator in brackets" (trans. S.N.).
8. See Alber et al. The authors distinguish three aspects of unnaturalness in narratives: unnatural storyworlds, unnatural minds, and unnatural acts of narration. "Five Years of Life" is only unnatural in the first regard.
9. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 106–109.
10. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 191–92.
11. James Phelan's comments suggest that he sees the sentence as an elliptical sentence of indirect discourse (equivalent to "He thought that it wasn't as cold as the night before") and clearly considers it to be a subjective sentence, in the usual sense of the term (see below, n. 12). But for Banfield, sentences of indirect discourse are objective, not subjective, in a purely linguistic sense.

12. In my view, this analysis, which is based on the author's epilinguistic or even "epitheoretical" knowledge, is stronger than the one suggested by James Phelan, for whom the sentence "Outside, it wasn't as cold as the night before" is simply "a subjective sentence that captures Raúl's perception upon exiting the station. Within his subjectivity, it was just last night that he had last been outside. What the story goes on to show is that his subjective perception is erroneous." However, I will leave it to the reader to decide.

13. The sentence "A girl in black pants and a green sweater was waving at them from across the street" is ambiguous as to its objective or subjective status (possible attachment of a deictic adverb such as "now"; actual absence of any lexical or grammatical element having a deictic function; absence likewise of any non-deictic lexical or grammatical elements).

14. See the beginning of the story, where Raúl has to leave a friendly gathering at the Bolivians' to catch the last metro; also see 97: "He was always meaning to get involved in a more or less stable relationship with a French girl, as the ultimate way to get a good grip on the language. But, in fact, all his friends, male or female, were part of the Latin American crowd."

15. To keep the text closer to the Spanish text from the angle of interest to us, *"pero había otros nuevos, con las hojas a medio abrir"* should have been translated as "but there were some new ones with still-uncut pages," and *"En la pared del fondo estaba su querida reproducción de Miró,"* etc., as "Hanging on the back wall was his dear Miró poster," etc. In the text of the English translation, the subjective context begins with "There were three photos on the table" and contains few characteristic subjective elements.

16. On embeddable subjective elements, see Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences* 89–90. On evaluative adjectives, see 54–56 (the definitive characteristic of evaluative adjectives is that they can appear in an exclamative of the adjective + noun type, e.g., "Poor boy!").

17. See Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences* 195–196.

18. The adjective "hysterical" is taken from Raúl's direct speech addressed to Mirta in the metro station (see 102: "I'm fed up with that relationship, but I don't have the guts to break it off. Whenever I write her a letter hinting that I'd like to, she answers with these long, hysterical tirades saying she'll kill herself if I leave her; that's blackmail of course, but what if she does it?").

19. Other examples include: "*Después de eso, suspiró; podía ser interpretado como un suspiro de inauguración*" (130) ("Then he sighed, a sigh that sounded like a beginning" [103]) and "*Trato hecho, dijo ella, sonriendo francamente y tendiéndole, ahora sí, la mano*" (127) ("'Deal,' she answered, with a big smile; this time, she did offer to shake hands" [100]), as well as two occurrences combining *pretérito indefinido* + "*próxima.*" However, the deictic status of this adjective is not obvious. It is translated in English by "next," which is not deictic.

20. Raúl's misadventure can be compared to the following passage from *La Tregua,* a realist novel written in diary form: "I know that I only have another four months of entries, reversing entries, balance sheets, running accounts and tax returns. But I'd give a year of my life to reduce those four months to zero. Actually, if I think it through, I wouldn't give a year of my life, because now my life depends on Avellaneda [name of the female character]" (141; trans. S.N.). The passage from one to the other (i.e., from *La Tregua* to Raúl's misadventure) is via a double process of expansion and literalization.

21. See the description of his explosion of feelings: "What came next was more than a state of mind; it was an organic exaltation that exploded through his whole body, ears, throat, lungs, heart, stomach, sex and knees" (103) (*"La emoción subsiguiente fue algo más que un estado de ánimo; realmente fue una exaltación orgánica que abarcó orejas, garganta, pulmones, corazón, estómago, sexo, rodillas*" [130]).

22. In this regard, the present article forms a pair with Patron, "The Death of the Narrator," which

focuses especially on the problems of interpretation raised by narratological theory and analysis as opposed to the poetic theory of narration.

23. "NOW" designates the reference point for the interpretation of deictic adverbs of time which can appear in subjective sentences.

24. "Look, just to show you what a flexible, understanding guy I am, I'll go first. If you're still awake when I'm through, then it'll be your turn. And if you fall asleep, I promise I won't be insulted. Deal?" (100).

25. "Do you have a boyfriend, or a husband, or guys you go out with?" (102). James Phelan has suggested another interpretation of the absence of communication between the two characters: it is "consistent with his having experienced the slow erosion of the relationship over five years. Thus the 'trick fate played on them' is not only their meeting in the locked Metro station—which is now not as vivid as something that happened yesterday but only a 'fading memory'—but also in giving and not giving them those wished-for five years." I entirely agree with Phelan about there being something mysterious (or, to employ the term used earlier, unnatural) from the point of view of experientiality in the short story, since we are led to imagine that Raúl and Mirta have both experienced and not experienced five years of their life (experienced: love has had the time to fade; not experienced: without their having had the opportunity to feel any of the joys of love). I think nevertheless, as remarked earlier concerning the exception operator (God, the Devil, destiny . . .) who enabled their passage from one world to the other, that the question "How is such contradictory experientiality possible?" escapes the reader's interest. I quite agree with Phelan that the "trick fate played on them" is not only Raúl and Mirta's meeting in the locked Metro station (this is Raúl's viewpoint: it is, after all, a subjective sentence) and the rest of his analysis seems to me to be perfectly compatible with my own.

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